

Create an Inexpensive Landscape

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Summary: By increasing value towards existing elements and appropriate manmade elements, and embracing a simple set of uses, money can be saved for more intensive outdoor living spaces.

Landscaping is undervalued in the high desert. It creates an outdoor living environment, it extends indoor living spaces outward, and it strives to welcome in the benefits of the natural environment. Anything less is merely exterior decorating. Below are some ways to create a landscape that adds value to a space, without spending unnecessary money:

New Construction

- Generously preserve existing vegetation and grades onsite before and during construction. In the contract with a builder, require temporary chain link fencing around features and plants that require protection. Specify a monetary fine they pay if they disturb any such areas. Cost to ignore: \$.15 - \$20.00 and up per square foot.
- Minimize vast landscape areas; preserving existing natural features and vegetation allows this.
- Create few, substantial planting areas that accommodate larger plants; avoid small, unusable areas.
- Don't purchase a large property. More land equals more money spent on landscaping.

Existing Construction

- Preserve existing plants, if they compliment proposed work visually and culturally. Remove weak-wooded or surface-rooted plants. Cost to ignore: structural damage, leaf litter, and unhealthy plantings.

General Hints

- Do not purchase a property with many potential, future problems, unless your funds allow.
- Confine pets and other animals with physical means; nice landscapes and roaming dogs are fiction.
- Good design costs more than free designs initially, but less than removals of a poor design.
- Don't buy plants without a completed, well-thought-out plan.
- Work with natural drainage systems and local plants; minimize artificial systems and foreign materials.
- Strive to control erosion with native plants and larger rock rather than retaining walls or railroad ties.
- Implement water harvesting; it allows the soil to absorb rain for plants and creates attractive landforms.
- Minimize boulders unless they are on-site; gentle soil mounding or berms create drama for less money.
- Thoroughly kill and remove all weeds, then set finished grades, before plants are installed.
- Less is more; do a few things well. Use a minimum of different materials, species, and site elements.
- Be willing to part with items on your wish list that do not fit your budget.
- *Never use plastic under mulches; avoid filter fabric except where weeds are uncontrollable.* Cost to ignore: \$.15 per square foot, roots deprived of oxygen and rain, wind-blown weed growth, and a shortened lifespan.
- Avoid busy materials for interest, such as stepping-stones, flagstone pieces, and brick paths.
- Avoid using steel, brick, railroad tie, or concrete edging; strong plant masses define edges best.
- Be careful using plants with names that contradict dryness: swamp, Norway, water, or alpine included.
- Install impact plants first: trees, key shrubs and accents. Install flowers and ground covers later.
- Don't skimp on plants; gravel mulch can always be installed later.
- Use plants with a smaller initial size wherever possible; smaller plants usually establish and grow faster.
- Select large plants to cover large areas; don't use many delicate perennials in large areas.
- Select plants that like your soils with no amendments. Azaleas or Bluegrass do not cut it!
- Select plants that grow on natural rainfall once established (but contractors rarely warranty them)